INNOVATION FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY

WiCDS Wits Centre for Diversity Studies

CALL FOR PAPERS: EXTREMIST MYTHOLOGIES

WITS CENTRE FOR DIVERSITY STUDIES ANNUAL CONFERENCE
14 -16 OCTOBER 2025
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

The Wits Centre for Diversity Studies (WiCDS), in partnership with the Innovation Fou ndation for Democracy, invites proposals for its 11th annual conference, on the topic of 'Extremist Mythologies'.

Much contemporary scholarship and public conversation are concerned with the rise of populism and extremism , their causes a s well as their consequences. Less attention has been paid to the particular way s in which extremist political positions support and mainstream themselves, and how they activate sameness and difference as part of their symbolic arsenal. Even those extremisms which appear more rational or humane , or more in line with our personal belief systems, utilise a conceptual scaffolding to maintain their appeal. This interdisciplinary conference is interested in the narratives, discourses, symbols, myths and images that are pervasive throughout contemporary cultural and political polarisation. It aims to ask not just why but also, from a granular perspective, how extremism is formed, marketed and transmitted, how it attains virality, how it uses myth to foster emotion.

Drawing on the concerns of Diversity Studies, which critically interrogates difference and power, scholars, artists and activists are invited to submit work along , but not limited to, the following themes:

- War, dictatorship and violence
- Scapegoating processes , from poverty to migration
- Racialisation and race talk
- Identity politics at extremes
- The demystification of liberation movements
- Desirable/undesirable disability
- Extreme responses to extreme weather
- Tradwives, slay queens and 'new' femininities
- Defaming and reclaiming trans identity
- The incelisation of big politics
- Polygamy, homophobia and conservative family values in Africa
- Extremist religion, from settler Zionism to prosperity gospels
- AI, algorithms and the rise of predatory media
- Dystopian and utopian visions of post /extremist futures

Proposals should include a title, an abstract of 300 words and a brief biography. We welcome proposals for panels, and for non-traditional and creative responses from artists and performers. Proposals and other queries can be sent to conference.wicds@wits.ac.za . This call closes on **30 May 2025** .

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